



Pet, livestock owners urged to take extra care of animals in extreme cold this week

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Contact: [Raechelle Belli](#), 608-224-5005 or [Bill Cosh](#), Comms. Director, 608-224-5020

MADISON – Though you might think that an animal’s furry exterior will keep them warm and snug in extremely cold weather, think again. Extreme cold weather poses all sorts of threats to animals including both pets and livestock. And the things humans do to protect themselves, like using antifreeze and salt, add more dangers for animals, says state humane veterinarian Dr. Yvonne Bellay of the Division of Animal Health.

“Food, water and shelter are the top priorities, but grooming and leashing are important, too,” Bellay says. She offers these tips on keeping your pet best friend warm and happy:

- **Food**—Outdoor pets need more food, of good quality, in cold weather to produce body heat.
- **Shelter**—Outdoor animals need a dry house that’s large enough for them to stand, sit, turn around and lie down comfortably, but not so large that its normal body heat is lost. Line the bottom with dry, nonabsorbent material that won’t get wet, matted, and frozen. Marsh hay works well; leaves and fabric do not.
- **Water**—Make sure your outdoor pets have fresh water daily – ice or snow will not do, because the animal has to expend too much body heat melting them. Ideally, you can provide an inexpensive heater that sits right in the water bowl to prevent freezing. If you can’t do that, fill the bowl with fresh, tepid water at least twice a day.
- **Antifreeze**—Leaked or spilled antifreeze (ethylene glycol) is a deadly lure to animals with its sweet taste. Clean it up, and if possible, switch to a less dangerous formulation like propylene glycol.
- **Walking**—Rub petroleum jelly on your pet’s paws before heading out for a walk. It will protect them from salt and other de-icers. When you get back inside, wipe paws, legs and stomach to remove any de-icers or antifreeze that the animal might lick off itself. Be sure to remove any snow or ice between the paw pads, too, to prevent bleeding. While you’re outdoors, keep your dog leashed. Snow and ice can make it difficult for dogs to follow a scent, and they can become lost or run away in panic. Finally, those sweaters and coats some people put on their dogs are not just cute. Short-haired dogs really need them outdoors in cold weather.
- **Grooming**—Wet, dirty, matted coats cannot insulate against the cold, so be sure your animals are well-groomed. But never shave a dog’s coat in winter. After bathing an animal, dry it thoroughly before letting it outdoors.
- **Cars**—Cats sometimes crawl under cars and into the engine compartment, seeking shelter and warmth. Bang on the hood before starting the car on cold days to startle sleeping animals. And remember, just as cars heat to oven temperature in summer, they can be equally deadly in winter when they turn into freezers. Don’t leave your pet alone in a vehicle. It may freeze to death.
- **Sleeping**—Even indoor animals need a warm place to sleep, off the floor and out of drafts. This is especially true for old or ill animals.

Animals can suffer from hypothermia, frostbite and other cold weather injuries. Harsh conditions weaken their immune systems and open the door to illness. Calves and swine are especially susceptible to cold.

“Livestock owners need to provide extra nutrition, plenty of good bedding, and protection from winds and moisture,” says state humane veterinarian Dr. Yvonne Bellay. “And you need to have healthy animals going into winter. Look for early signs of disease and for parasites. Calves often have undetected pneumonia that kills quickly when the temperature drops. Be particularly careful with animals that have recently been brought here from a warmer climate or that have been indoors and are now outdoors. If they’re not acclimated, they’ll suffer more winter ills.”

Bellay offers further advice to keep livestock comfortable and productive during winter’s worst:

- **Shelter**—Wind chill carries body heat away from animals just as it does from humans. Generally, a 20-mph wind is about equal to a 30-degree drop in temperature. Make sure animals have a place to get out of the wind, even if it is just a windbreak or a three-sided shelter. Make sure shelters are not located where other buildings deflect wind and snow into the shelter.
- **Food**—Animals burn extra calories to keep warm in severe cold. If they stay outdoors, they will need more food than usual — and good quality food. As a general rule, nutrient requirements increase about 1 percent for every degree that the temperature falls below 20 degrees F. Horses’ nutrition requirements increase below 45 degrees F.
- **Water**—Provide access to fresh water – not frozen streams or snow – daily. Stock tank heaters and frost-proof watering devices will ensure that livestock get enough to drink.
- **Bedding**—Plenty of dry bedding will insulate udders and legs from frostbite.
- **Moisture**—Long hair or fleece insulates only when it is dry. Wet or muddy hair or fleece loses insulating ability and actually cools the animal as it dries, which in turn increases the animal’s caloric needs.
- **Transportation**—Temperatures near freezing can be fatal to animals in a truck – especially calves and swine – when the wind can whistle in or rain can soak their coats. Cover openings in the vehicle box to cut wind chill and keep rain out, but allow some air to pass over the animals for ventilation. Provide a deep bed of dry straw for calves younger than 4 weeks or for any swine.

For more information, visit datcp.wi.gov or talk to your veterinarian about precautions.

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